

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

INFO OCT-01 ARA-10 EUR-12 NEA-10 ISO-00 IO-13 CIAE-00
DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05
PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 ICA-11 /109 W
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R 280640Z JUL 78
FM AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9190
INFO AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY DJIBOUTI
AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
AMEMBASSY NAIROBI
USINT HAVANA

C O N F I D E N T I A L ADDIS ABABA 3294

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, ET
SUBJ: ANOTHER ETHIOPIAN DISSIDENT GROUP: STATUS OF TPLF

REF: KHARTOUM 3007

SUMMARY: TIGRAI PEOPLES LIBERATION FRONT (TPLF), OPERATING MAINLY IN NORTHWESTERN TIGRE REGION, HAS BEGUN TO PUBLICIZE ITS EXISTENCE AND "NATIONALIST" OPPOSITION TO ETHIOPIAN GOVERNMENT UNDER MILITARY RULING COUNCIL (DIRG). TPLF APPEARS TO HAVE SOME MILITARY CAPABILITY, TO COOPERATE WITH ERITREAN SECESSIONISTS AND TO PROFESS A REGIONALIST PHILOSOPHY SHORT OF FULL INDEPENDENCE. WHILE IT MAY PROVE TO BE BOTHERSOME IMPEDIMENT TO ETHIOPIAN MILITARY OPERATIONS THROUGH NW TIGRE REGION INTO ERITREA, TPLF WILL NOT THREATEN OUTCOME OF THESE OPERATIONS. END SUMMARY.

1. TPLF HAS PRINTED "MEMORANDUM" (JULY 1978) ON BACKGROUND AND GOALS OF ITS MOVEMENT (BEING POUCHED TO AF/E). TPLF
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CLAIMS THAT IT BEGAN ITS CLANDESTINE POLITICAL ACTIVITIES IN 1972 AND FORMED ARMED GEURRILLA WING IN 1975 (THIS INCARNATION OF TPLF IS NOT TO BE CONFUSED WITH TLF, WHICH WAS CREATED BY FORMER TIGRE GOVERNOR RAS MENGESHA SEYOUM AND ALIGNED WITH EDU). TPLF STATES THAT IT IS WAGING "NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC REVOLUTION FOR NATIONAL SELF-DETERMINATION OF TEGREAN PEOPLE". DURING ITS THREE YEARS OF ARMED STRUGGLE,

TPLF FURTHER CLAIMS THAT IT HAS "LIBERATED" ALMOST HALF OF ITS TERRITORY AND ENJOYS WIDE SUPPORT FROM OPPRESSED TIGREAN PEOPLE. TPLF ALSO ASSERTS THAT SINCE ITS EMERGENCE IT HAS COORDINATED ITS ACTIVITIES WITH ELF-RC (LEFTIST WING OF ELF) AND EPLF IN NUMBER OF SUCCESSFUL MILITARY OPERATIONS CARRIED OUT IN TIGRAI. TPLF ALSO STATES IN MEMORANDUM THAT IT IS HISTORICAL DESCENDANT OF "FAMOUS 1943 POPULAR NATIONAL MOVEMENT, WOYANE, IN WHICH TIGREANS REVOLTED AND RESISTED AGAINST AMHARA OPPRESSIVE RULE."

2. RELIABLE SOURCES WITH DIRECT ACCESS TO TPLF LEADERS SAID THAT TPLF ORIGINALLY TRIED TO POLITICIZE TIGREAN PEOPLE ON BASIS OF MARXISM-LENINISM BUT IT WAS NOT ACCEPTED BY OVERSHELMINGLY TRADITIONAL, RURAL POPULATION. TPLF THEN ADJUSTED ITS POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY TO ONE OF PURE TIGRAI NATIONALISM WHICH DOES NOT, HOWEVER, SEEK INDEPENDENCE FOR TIGRE REGION. THIS HAS PROVEN MORE PALATABLE TO POPULATION AND TPLF DOES APPEAR TO ENJOY FAIR DEGREE OF SUPPORT IN WESTERN TIGRE REGION WHICH IS POPULATED BY HOMOGENEOUS TIGRAI PEOPLES. CLAIMS OF TPLF CONTROL OF THIS AREA ARE PROBABLY TRUE, GIVEN FACT NEARLY ALL OF RURAL AREA IS INACCESSIBLE BY ROAD AND ETHIOPIANS HAVE NOT MADE MAJOR COMMITMENT TO EXERCISE AUTHORITY OVER OUTLYING VILLAGES.

3. ONE PRONG OF CURRENT ETHIOPIAN MILITARY OPERATION INTO SOUTHEASTERN ERITREA HAD TO MOVE THROUGH TPLF-HELD TERRITORY
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IN NORTHWEST TIGRE REGION FROM ENTICCIO AND ADWA NORTH TO ADI QUALA. TPLF CLAIMS THERE WAS MAJOR CONFRONTATION WEEK OF JULY 10 DURING WHICH ETHIOPIANS LOST 4 TANKS, 2 APCS AND 500 KILLED AND WOUNDED. TPLF ACKNOWLEDGES IT ALSO TOOK "HEAVY" LOSSES IN PERSONNEL. ETHIOPIANS WERE ABLE TO BREAK-THROUGH SERIES OF TWO MOUNTAIN FORMATIONS JUST SOUTH OF MEREB RIVER (ERITREA/TIGRE BORDER) AFTER TWO DAYS OF HEAVY FIGHTING. (THIS IS LARGEST TPLF/ETHIOPIAN CONFRONTATION SINCE MILITARY WING OF TPLF WAS FORMED).

4. TPLF IN LAST 6-8 MONTHS CLAIMS TO HAVE SUCCESSFULLY BLOCKED ADIGRAT TO AXUM EAST-WEST ROAD IN TIGRE REGION AND TO HAVE "CAPTURED" ENTICCIO AND AXUM FOR 10-12 HOURS ON TWO OR THREE OCCASIONS. TPLF ESTIMATES ITS MILITARY STRENGTH AT 2,000-3,000 LIGHTLY-ARMED BUT WELL-TRAINED AND DISCIPLINED GUERRILLAS. AS DEMONSTRATION OF ITS NATIONALIST AND NON-MARXIST PHILOSOPHY, TPLF DISARMED AND EJECTED MILITARY WING OF ETHIOPIAN PEOPLE'S REVOLUTIONARY PARTY (EPRP) FROM TIGRE APPROXIMATELY TWO MONTHS AGO.

5. TPLF DOES NOT REPRESENT MAJOR THREAT TO ETHIOPIAN MILITARY OPERATIONS NOR ITS ULTIMATE CONTROL OVER TIGRE REGION.

HOWEVER, TPLF CAN BE EXPECTED TO CONTINUE HIT-AND-RUN HARASSMENT OF ETHIOPIAN COLUMNS AS THEY MOVE THROUGH MOUNTAINOUS TPLF TERRITORY TOWARD ERITREA. THERE WILL ALSO BE DEGREE OF COOPERATION BETWEEN TPLF AND ERITREAN GROUPS (EPLF AND ELF) AS ERITREANS ATTEMPT TO FORESTALL ETHIOPIAN ASSAULTS INTO ERITREA.
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